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Website Building Basics

Learning Objectives:
- Become familiar with basic website design
- Know how to plan and wireframe their website
- Understand the options for website creation, as well as their differences and capabilities

Disclaimer

This class is intended to provide an introduction to the basics of starting a website, website design, and a preview of the platforms available to build a website. The goal of the class is not to learn how to use each platform thoroughly, but to get a better sense of how to make a plan for your site and what tools are available to use.

1. **Planning**

- The goal of this class is not to learn how to use each platform thoroughly, but to get a better sense of how to make a plan for your site and what tools you can use.
- When thinking about starting a website, planning the content you want to include and the tools you want to use is important.
- Have a plan
  - Creating a plan before beginning a website can help organize your thoughts and goals. Just like creating a rough draft for a paper or a resume, try creating a rough draft for your website.
  - If you haven't thought of what kind of website you want to create, you can choose a topic and practice creating a website for a blog on that topic.
    - Example topics: Travel Blog, Design, Business, Cooking/Recipes

Activity: **Use page 3 to make a plan for your website.**

- Goals: This can help you narrow your focus as you start your website
  - What is your goal?
  - Why do you want to build a website?
  - Try to be clear about what you want from your website.

- Content: This will help you when you begin adding things to your website.
  - Do you have a business, blog, personal, or organizational website in mind? Some combination of these?
  - What kind of information, photos, etc. do you want to include?
  - What info do you need/want to convey to people?
  - What action do you want your users to take?
    - Reading your posts? Interacting with others? Buying something?

- Audience: This can help focus your site and allow you to measure success.
  - Think about your target audience.
  - Who do you want visiting your site?

- Time: Thinking about how much time you can reasonably spend on your site is important.
  - How much time do you have/want to spend creating and maintaining your site?
  - Is it just you? Do you have a team? Will you hire a professional?

<u>Alternative Options</u>

- Do you need a website for accomplishing what you're trying to communicate? If you are a maker/crafter/artist, think about if you actually need your own website.
- There are other platforms you can take advantage of.
  - Etsy: ecommerce platform for handmade or vintage items
  - Ko-fi: a platform where people can contribute money to support your work
  - Patreon: a membership-based platform to create a subscription content service
  - Social Media: tools like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest can help you promote yourself or your business.

Make a Plan
Creating a plan before beginning a website can help organize your thoughts and goals.

Goals:

_____

_____

_____

Content:

_____

_____

_____

Audience:

_____

_____

_____

Time (creating and maintaining):

_____

_____

_____

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2. Design

- One thing that is very important to think about is what you want your website to look like. You can convey information and help users find what they're looking for through an intentional structure and design for your site.
- Take a look at some websites and think of things you automatically notice and things you like or dislike about the design of the site.

Design Examples:
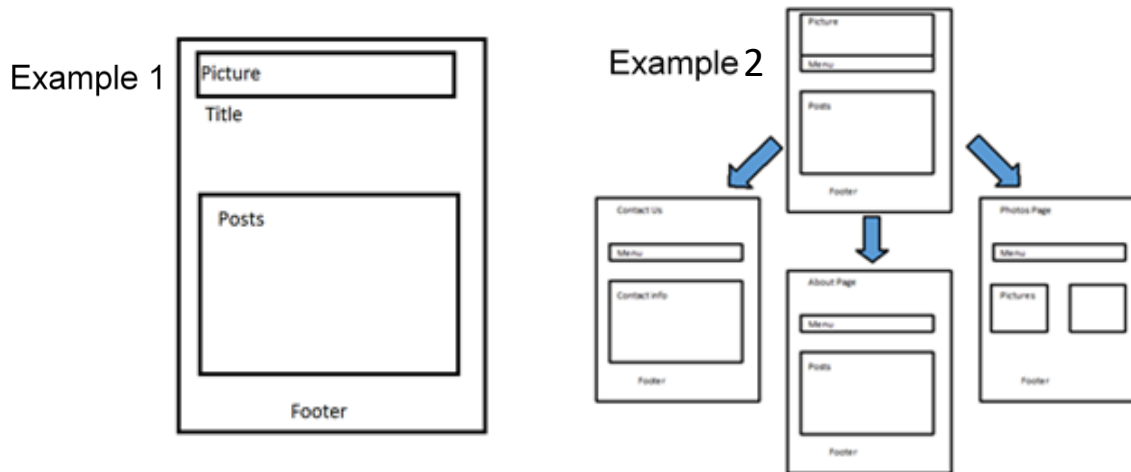
Activity: **Use the next page to design your website.**

- Things to keep in mind
  - User Experience
    - User experience refers to designing a site with the users in mind.
      - What will this look like to someone using it on their phone or tablet?
      - Are my website colors and fonts easy to read?
      - Can people find what they are looking for?

  - Keep it Clean and Consistent
    - Think about the colors, fonts, images you want to use in your site design.
      - What are your key colors you want to use?
      - Do you have a logo or image you want to include?
    - Keeping things clean and consistent can make your site easier to use and can add a sense of cohesiveness if your site has multiple pages.
    - Many website building tools have features that allow you to pick a theme to use across your whole site.

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Design Activity

What will your website look like? What elements will be included? Drawing a sketch can help you identify what features you want to include. We're going to create a wireframe of our website, which is a representation or mock-up of a website that shows the structure and flow.

3. Development

Now that we have a plan and an idea for structure, we can figure out the best tools to actually build out our website. We'll overview some options.

- Coding Options (HTML/CSS/JS)
    - One option is to code your site yourself.
        - You can use a combination of coding languages like HTML, CSS, and JavaScript to create a custom website.
        - You get the most control over what your site will look like, but coding can be time consuming and more technical than using a website builder.

- Hybrid Options
    - There are some options, like Wordpress.org, that combine some features of a website builder with the customization of hand coding.
        - These options are highly customizable and good if you need flexibility, but do not typically include hosting.

- Website Builder Options
    - We'll focus most of our time on exploring website builders. Website building platforms can be used to "quickly" create a website. You do not have to create a website from scratch or even study HTML and CSS code to build one.
        - The process is similar to creating a Facebook page, but more customizable.
    - Website Building Platforms give you WYSIWYG functionality.
        - WYSIWYG stands for What You See Is What You Get.
        - You can drag and drop items or elements onto your page to instantly see what the finished product will look like.
    - Some options include:
        - Wordpress.com
        - [Wix](Wix)
        - Weebly
        - Squarespace
        - Shopify
    - Plans and tiers
        - Most of these options have tiered pricing, most starting with a free option and then increasing in cost based on storage options and other available features.
        - These are not the only platforms - do your research to find what works best for you.

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Common Website Builder Options

	Wix	**Wordpress.com**	**Weebly**	**Squarespace**
Cost	Free + Tiered	Free + Tiered	Free + Tiered	No free option
Storage	Starting at 500MB	Starting at 3GB	Starting at 500MB	Unlimited
E-Commerce	Available with upgrade	Available with upgrade	Yes	Available in Business Plan

Website Logistics

It's also important to understand some of the logistics behind having a website. Two important components are your domain and hosting.

- Domain and Hosting:
  - Domain:
    - The domain name is the name of your website and is shown in the address bar when people visit your site. You can either choose a free website address or buy a custom one.
    - Most website building platforms all offer at least one free domain. If it's free it will usually include the name of the platform.
      - Example: www.ghostwriterdenver.wordpress.com
    - You can also search for and shop around for a domain name using Google Domains, or namecheap.com
      - Note that usually you can create a domain through your builder and these other sites are just to help you check what's available, no account/fees required.

  - Hosting:
    - Having a website online takes up storage space. Computers called servers store and send your website information to computers worldwide. This is called web hosting.
    - All websites on the internet need web hosting.

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- Some website building tools include web hosting with your account. If you need a hosting platform some options include:
    - Blue Host
    - Dream Host
    - HostGator

One way to think about these two components is like the domain name is the address of your house and web hosting is the house itself.

3. Maintenance

Once you've planned, designed, and built your website, you also have to think about maintaining your site. That includes examining how many people are visiting your site, increasing your SEO (search engine optimization), and making a plan for updates.

- Analytics
    - Most website building tools come with features to look at the analytics of your site. This can include:
        - How many people have visited your site in a given time
        - How many people have read/viewed a post or page
        - What countries those people are viewing your site from
    - Analytics can be useful in determining if you're reaching your target audience, but you are the ultimate judge of whether your site is meeting your needs and accomplishing your goals.

- Promoting your Website
    - Having a website can be a great tool to accomplish your organizational, business, or personal goals.
    - You may need to promote your website with social media, person-to-person contact, advertising, etc. outside of the website itself to generate traffic.
    - Think of your website like a storefront. While some people may stumble upon your place of business, it usually helps to get the word out to get people to find your business.

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- SEO basics
  - SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization.
    - SEO is all about giving your website the best chances for someone to find it in a web search, ideally in the first ten search results.
  - There are a number of techniques to increase your site's visibility on the web.
    - Registering your website with search engines, like Google and Bing.
    - Providing keywords on your website.
    - Creating links to other reputable websites.

- Plan for Maintenance
  - Think about creating a plan for how often you want to add content, update your site, respond to comments, etc.

4. More Resources

The library eResource Universal Class has several classes on website building. These classes are free if you have a library card. There are also several website building and coding books available through the catalog.

Material for this class was borrowed from Denver Public Library's Start Your Website technology class.

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